

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

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TAGS: PFOR, PK, IN, BG

SUBJ: CONCILIATORY GOP COMMENTS TOWARD INDIA AND BANGLADESH

REF: ISLAMABAD 3519

SUMMARY: MINSTATE AZIZ AHMED, IN REMARKABLY CONCILIATORY TELEVISION STATEMENT, DECLARED THAT BOTH PAKISTAN AND INDIA WERE SEEKING GOOD NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS AND THAT PROSPECTS FOR DURABLE PEACE BETTER THAN EVER BEFORE. HE DENIED THAT GOP IN APRIL 9 JOINT STATEMENT HAD ADMITTED CRIMES ON PART OF PAK ARMED FORCES IN FORMER EAST PAKISTAN BUT SAID GOP WOULD CONDEMN THEM IF ANY ACTUALLY HAD BEEN COMMITTED. GOP HAS INTRODUCED LEGISLATION INTO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO AMEND CONSTITUTION, ELIMINATING REFERENCE TO EAST PAKISTAN OFFENSIVE TO BANGLADESH. END SUMMARY.

1. AZIZ AHMED, MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENSE AND FOREIGN

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AFFAIRS, WAS INTERVIEWED ON TELEVISION BY PANEL OF NEWSMEN

APRIL 14 AS FIRST GUEST IN NEW "MEET THE PRESS" PROGRAM. MINSTATE'S COMMENTS DEVOTED ALMOST ENTIRELY TO INDIA-PAKISTAN-BANGLADESH RELATIONS IN LIGHT RECENTLY-CONCLUDED TRIPARTITE CONFERENCE.

2. REVIEWING DEVELOPMENTS IN INDO-PAK RELATIONS SINCE 1971, AZIZ AHMED NOTED THAT INDIAN PRIME MINISTER AT 1972 SIMLA TALKS HAD STATED THAT STRONG STABLE PAKISTAN WAS IN INDIA'S OWN INTEREST. BOTH COUNTRIES HAD PLEDGED AT SIMLA TO END PAST CONFRONTATION AND TAKE STEPS TO ESTABLISH DURABLE PEACE. ACTIONS TAKEN BY BOTH SIDES SINCE THEN, HE SAID, HAD DEMONSTRATED THAT BOTH WANTED GOOD NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS WITH OTHER. HE BELIEVED PROSPECTS FOR ESTABLISHING DURABLE PEACE WITH INDIA HAD NEVER BEEN SO BRIGHT AS THEY WERE NOW.

3. MINISTER CONTINUED THAT BOTH INDIA AND PAKISTAN HAD COME TO RECOGNIZE NEED FOR TALKS BETWEEN THEM TO STOP ARMS RACE SO THAT BOTH COULD DEVOTE RESOURCES TO IMPROVING CONDITIONS FOR THEIR PEOPLES.

4. WITH REGARD BANGLADESH, AZIZ AHMED SAID PAKISTAN WAS ANXIOUS TO ESTABLISH "CLOSEST POSSIBLE" RELATIONS AND HAD RECEIVED INDICATIONS "THAT BANGLADESH ALSO WANTED A SIMILAR RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS COUNTRY." AT NEXT MONTH'S SCHEDULED TALKS BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH, ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WOULD BE AMONG SUBJECTS DISCUSSED, ALONG WITH DIVISION OF ASSETS AND DEBTS AND SIMILAR MATTERS. WITH GOOD WILL, HE HOPED THE TWO GOVERNMENTS COULD REACH A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE SETTLEMENT.

5. ASKED TO COMMENT ON BANGLADESH AGREEMENT TO DROP WAR CRIMES TRIALS, AZIZ AHMED DENIED THAT GOP IN APRIL 9 JOINT STATEMENT HAD CONCEDED THAT CRIMES HAD ACTUALLY BEEN COMMITTED BY PAK FORCES. IF ANY HAD BEEN COMMITTED, HOWEVER, GOP WAS PREPARED CONDEMN THEM REGARDLESS OF WHO COMMITTED THEM. "THE TRIALS WERE NOT DROPPED BECAUSE OF ANY APOLOGY BUT THIS WAS BECAUSE OF THE NEED TO PROMOTE RECONCILIATION."

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ASKED WHY APRIL 9 STATEMENT MADE NO MENTION OF ATROCITIES COMMITTED BY BENGALIS, HE REPLIED THAT "WE DID NOT GO THERE TO EXCHANGE CHARGES." THE QUESTION OF WHETHER EXCESSES HAD BEEN COMMITTED BY GOP FORCES IN EAST PAKISTAN WOULD BE ONE FOR WAR COMMISSION APPOINTED BY PRESIDENT BHUTTO (REFTEL) TO ANSWER.

6. ON DAY FOLLOWING AZIZ AHMED TELEVISION APPEARANCE,

GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED NUMBER OF CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS FOR NATIONAL ASSEMBLY APPROVAL. ONE AMENDMENT WOULD DELETE CLAUSE IN PRESENT CONSTITUTION PROVIDING THAT "THE CONSTITUTION WILL BE APPROPRIATELY AMENDED SO AS TO ENABLE THE PEOPLE OF THE PROVINCE OF EAST PAKISTAN, AS AND WHEN FOREIGN AGGRESSION IN THAT PROVINCE AND ITS EFFECTS ARE ELIMINATED, TO BE REPRESENTED IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE FEDERATION". FOR THIS CLAUSE GOP PROPOSED SUBSTITUTING FOLLOWING: "PARLIAMENT MAY BY LAW ADMIT INTO THE FEDERATION NEW STATES AND AREAS ON SUCH TERMS AND CONDITIONS AS IT THINKS FIT." OTHER PROPOSED AMENDMENTS WERE LARGELY OF HOUSEKEEPING NATURE.

7. COMMENT: TONE OF AZIZ AHMED'S COMMENTS WAS REMARKABLY CONCILIATORY, ESPECIALLY COMING FROM WELL-KNOWN HARDLINER. CONCILIATORY ATTITUDE FURTHER UNDERLINED BY GOP'S MOVE TO DELETE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENCE TO EAST PAKISTAN, WHICH HAS BEEN IRRITANT IN PAKISTAN-BANGLADESH RELATIONS AND POSSIBLE OBSTACLE TO HOLDING OF BILATERAL GOP-BDG TALKS SCHEDULED FOR NEXT MONTH.
BYRAODE

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